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Various studies have shown that high school students have unrealistic expectations and poor perceptions of college. Whether caused by inaccurate counseling or by poor self-descriptions from the college, these cause student dissatisfaction or failure. This study, to see if admission officers' perceptions of campus climate as presented to the school counselor accurately represent the college environment, asked if (1) differences existed between the college press as seen by students and faculty and as presented to high school counselors by admission officers and (2) differences perceived by admission officers are intellectual or non-intellectual. From a 2-year and a 4-year college, 43 students, 39 faculty, and 10 admission officers were randomly selected. They were tested by the College Characteristic Index of Stern and Pace on items of policy, impression, procedure, attitude, and activity. The perception of college environment by the officers differed greatly from that of students and faculty, on both non-intellectual and intellectual items. The admission officer, tending to stress the college's positive attributes, may be partly responsible for the misconceptions held by counselors and high school seniors. A repeat of this study by officers on their own campuses could lessen the misunderstanding and increase the accuracy of their presentation. Future studies could examine the officer's personality, academic training, length of service, and whether campus experience narrows perceptual differences. (HH)

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A Comparison of Admission Officer, Faculty, and Student Perceptions of Their College Environment.

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CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGE
INFORMATION

The process of college choice is of concern to students, parents, counselors, and colleges. The quality of information possessed by a high school senior about a college can affect his success (Lauterbach and Vielhaber, 1966). Siddoway (1967) found that students have been given too little accurate and meaningful information. Stern (1968) found expectations of entering freshmen highly unrealistic at several colleges. The effect of differences between student expectations and the campus press has been investigated by Pervin (1967) and Stern (1962).

Students report their guidance counselor is an important source of information in selecting a college (Bentley and Salter, 1967a). Admission officers agree the school counselor is an essential resource in the students' school-college transition (Bentley and Salter, 1967b). Seymour (1968) found that counselors' perceptions of college environments geographically near their respective high schools were unrealistic.

> Whatever the reason, it would appear that college-bound seniors in the midst of the college-choice process do not have accurate perceptions of colleges in their own backyard. If anything, their counselors' perceptions are less accurate.

Unrealistic counseling which promotes unrealistic expectations can culminate in student dissatisfaction or failure. What sources of accurate information are available to the counselor?

Dyer (1965) stressed that colleges need to describe themselves better by utilizing measures of institutional climate. The admission officer is a logical resource to provide a valid description of his college's environment. The increasing number of high school

visitations by admission officers suggest colleges are attempting to provide information to the counselor. The counselor, better informed is in a position to provide his counselee accurate information. The role of the admission officer in disseminating information demands that he accurately portray his campus climate.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether the admission officer's perceptions of the campus climate as presented to the school counselor are congruent with the college's environment. The perceptions held by faculty and students was considered to represent the real campus press. The major questions asked were:

1. Are there differences between the college environment (press) as perceived by students or faculty, and that presented to high school counselors by admission officers?
2. If differences exist in perception of the college press by admission officers are they within the intellectual or non-intellectual climate.

METHOD

Data Collection and Subjects

The subjects were: 43 college students, 39 faculty, and 10 admission officers randomly selected from one two-year and one four-year college. Both institutions are residential colleges of the State University of New York. They were selected by their interest in self-evaluation of their admission program and size of staff. Samples were small so that only large differences would be measured. For a discussion of sample size and its effect on hypothesis testing, the reader is referred to Bakan (1966). Admission officers response

was complete for all staff members; most other groups responded with two-thirds or more, with the exception of students at College B where one-half responded.

Instrument

The instrument used was the College Characteristic Index (CCI) created by George G. Stern and C. Robert Pace. The CCI has identified intellectual and non-intellectual attributes of campus environments (Pace, 1962; Stern, 1962). The items composing the CCI scales are concerned with policies, impressions, procedures, attitudes, and activities characteristic of the campus (Michael and Boyer, 1965). The admission officers were directed to respond as if the CCI questions were posed by school counselors, thus giving an indice of their representation of the college environment. This modification is consistent with Stern's (1963) adaptations of the instrument. Student responses were collected by staff members of the college while the faculty and admission officers self-administered the CCI.

Data Analysis

Factor scores were computed for each subject from thirty scale scores. Mean factor scores were computed and transformed into standard scores for each sample group. Cattell's (1949) coefficient of profile similarity (rp) was computed. Cattell's (rp) coefficient can be interpreted as a coefficient of correlation, positively skewed with a mean slightly above zero. Horn's (1961) table of significance was used to determine profile similarity. A significant positive correlation in Table 1 should be interpreted as indicating a similarity in profile shape while a non-significant correlation indicates no

relationship between profile shapes. A significant negative correlation indicates dissimilarity of profile shape in the sense that where one group tends to perceive the factors as present in the college environment to a large degree, the other group perceives these factors as present to a small degree.

Insert Table 1 Here

RESULTS

From the analysis of the data the results indicate:

The representation of the college environment by the admission officers differ significantly from students (Table 1). Differences of perception are found in both the intellectual and non-intellectual climate of College A and College B. At College A the admissions officers perceive elements of the intellectual climate as being more pervasive than do students. They perceive the college as encouraging students to set high standards for themselves, and emphasizing student freedom and development of personal responsibility to a greater degree than students. Students do not perceive the college as setting high standards of achievement and as offering opportunities for students to develop leadership potential to the extent that admission officers do.

Admission officers at College B emphasize characteristics of their intellectual environment more than students. Several differences with students are identical to differences between student and admission officers perceptions at College A. (Table 2). In addition, admission officers perceive excellence of staff and facilities in academic areas to a greater degree than do students.

At College A and College B the admission officers, in general, perceive elements of the non-intellectual climate as more prominent than students. At both colleges, the admission officers over-emphasize the warmth and friendliness of group activities and opportunities for leadership growth when compared with student perceptions. Students at College B do not perceive the college as having as high

a degree of academic organization and structure as their admission officers. College A students perceive activities as devoted more to the welfare of fellow students and the underprivileged of the surrounding community than do their admission officers.

Insert Table 2 Here

A significant difference exists between admission officers representation of campus press and faculty perceptions for College B, but not for College A (Table 1 and 2). At College B, the admission officers differ with faculty in their perceptions of the intellectual and non-intellectual climate. Their differences with admission officers parallel student-admission officer differences but to a greater degree (Table 1 and 2). The faculty, in addition to areas which parallel student differences with admission officers, perceive less opportunities for collegiate play and amusement as well as fewer group activities devoted to the welfare of students or underprivileged in the community (Table 2).

The comparison of faculty-admission officer perceptions at College A do not differ on the whole. As table 2 indicates some individual factors do differ and parallel student-admission officer differences.

DISCUSSION

Admission officers perceive their college as possessing the attributes of nearly all factors to a greater extent than do faculty and students. The faculty at College B perceives the college as possessing to a lesser degree the elements of nearly all factors than do students or admission officers. Students' perception of the environment typically mediate between those of faculty and admission officers.

Stern's factors are described in a positive manner so that the higher the score on a factor, the greater extent the perceiver feels it exists in the college environment. At both colleges, the admission officers recorded the highest mean score for nearly all factors. They appear to overemphasize the positive characteristics of the campus, failing to represent the extent to which a given characteristic exists. They view the campus through "rose-colored glasses". The faculty at College B and at College A, to a lesser extent, perceive the campus climate as less viable than students or admission officers. Student perceptions are less extreme than either admission officers or faculty members.

There was considerable agreement between factors in which both faculty and students differed with admission officers. Even in College A where a significant difference between over-all perceptions was not found, there were four common factors where students and faculty differed significantly with admissions officers. Therefore, whether one argues that the student or faculty press is the "true" press of a college environment does not affect the results of this study. College admission officers should have an accurate understanding of both faculty and student perceptions of their college environment.

SUMMARY

The representation of the college environment by admission officers at the sampled colleges differs greatly from perceptions of the same environment by faculty and students. Differences exist in both the intellectual and non-intellectual climate. The admission

officers tend to exaggerate the positive attributes of their college environment. In so doing, they may be partially responsible for the unrealistic perceptions of college environments held by counselors and high school seniors. A replication of this study by admission officers at their own campus could lead to an understanding and resolution of perceptual differences. Discussion or planned activities in those areas where disparities are found to exist could increase the accuracy of the admission officer's representation of his campus. If similar differences exist in a wide variety of colleges, are they related to the admission officer's personality, academic training, or length of service at the college? Are differences in perceptions affected by the selectivity which the college maintains? Future inquiry should particularly center upon whether experience on the campus leads to a narrowing of perceptual differences. These questions and others will need to be answered before the selection of a college becomes a valid experience for high school seniors.

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TABLE 1

Profile Correlations Based On Comparisons Of the Perceptions Of Colleges Held By Admission Officers, Faculty, and Students At Their Respective Colleges

College A		College B	
Admission Officers		Admission Officers	
Faculty	.56*	Faculty	-.65*
Students	.14	Students	.14

*p < .001

TABLE 2

Comparison of Mean CCI Factor Scores
of the Intellectual and Non-Intellectual Climate
as Perceived by Admission Officers,
Faculty, and Students

INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE	College A			College B		
	Admissions	Faculty	Students	Admissions	Faculty	Students
Work-Play	15.0	14.9	14.8	15.8	18.7**	15.2
Non-Voc. Climate	15.6	15.9	15.7	21.8	24.3	23.2
Aspiration Level	22.6	17.1***	19.4***	24.8	18.7***	21.9**
Intellectual Climate	18.6	17.3	15.4	32.4	24.7***	27.5**
Student Dignity	20.2	19.7	14.2***	20.6	19.9	20.4
Academic Climate	7.0	7.3	6.5	14.4	11.3***	12.4**
Academic Achievement	24.0	21.1*	21.2*	32.4	20.5***	23.4***
Self Expression	22.8	20.9**	19.8***	27.0	17.1***	22.7***
Non-Intellectual Climate						
Self Expression	22.8	20.9**	19.8***	27.0	17.1***	22.7***
Group Life	28.4	28.4	26.4*	28.6	22.2***	24.1***
Academic Organization	33.2	31.0	32.2	37.2	30.6***	33.6*
Social Form	24.0	23.5	28.0*	25.0	19.7***	25.0
Play-Work	25.0	25.1	25.2	24.2	21.3**	24.8
Vocational Climate	34.4	34.1	34.3	28.2	25.7	26.8

Note.-t tests compare faculty with admission officers, and students with admission officers.

*p <.05
**p <.01
***p <.001